

SYAG on Universal Afterschool and Summer Report

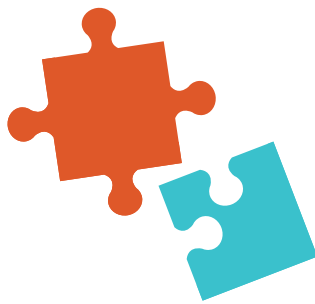
2022

Youth Recommendations for the Future of Afterschool



Vermont
Afterschool

Expanding Access



Expanded access to quality third-space opportunities for youth of all ages is an essential part in connecting youth to their community. Third spaces can be an important part of youth development, provide learning opportunities, and allow youth to explore new interest. Transportation, increased funding, and providing more and varied opportunities are the biggest factors youth see to expanding access.

Transportation is one of the biggest barriers to expanding access.

- Each community needs to evaluate how they can use the school bus and public transportation system to best support youth. Some ideas include:
 - Late buses to and from afterschool programs
 - More than one bus, so there can be a flexible schedule
 - Rethinking the routes to better reflect how young people move throughout the community
 - Increasing youth understanding and knowledge of how the public transit system works in their community

More funding is needed for schools, afterschool programs, youth spaces, clubs, and other out-of-school activities.

- More school funding allows for greater resources to be allocated to school-based programs, clubs, and activities to increase quality and variety
- Direct funding to afterschool programs and third spaces is also important to ensure there is a variety of quality out-of-school experiences for youth
- Increased funding will also contribute to no-cost or low-cost programs—an essential part of expanding access

More clubs and programs with diverse options available to youth need to be provided, so youth can explore their favorite activities and new interests.

- Youth need to have a direct voice in what programs, activities, and youth spaces are brought to the community
 - Allowing youth to start, design, and/or lead clubs would be helpful and is a great way to increase the variety of third-space opportunities
- Older youth need more clubs and afterschool programs that reflect their interests as well
 - As youth get older, their interests change and programs should reflect this, but often funding declines
 - Timing is an important consideration for older youth as they often have schoolwork and jobs; therefore, evening and weekend programs could be a good option



Youth Leadership

Leadership opportunities within programs and the community as a whole is one of the most sought after experiences youth focused on. Youth leadership roles provide great opportunities for learning and growth. Additionally, youth are experts in what they want and need in their community and in third spaces, so it is essential to involve their voice in every decision that impacts youth.

Youth should have leadership opportunities in afterschool programs, out-of-school activities, and clubs.

- Youth and adult third-space leaders should work together on all or most aspects of the program, including budgets, hiring staff, proposals, planning, group rules, and activities
- Older youth should be hired for leadership roles within the program
- Youth leaders are more relatable to the young people that attend the program, making it a more welcoming and comfortable environment

Youth need to be part of the decision-making process in every community.

- Surveys or “town hall” style meetings during lunch would be helpful to get input from youth about their experiences and what they want and need in their community
 - Zoom options could be available for youth that are homeschooled or absent

Youth Councils should be commonplace in every community and be given real power to impact decision-making.

- The councils need to have an active role in the community or program, with real responsibilities and power
- Councils can inform the community about what third-space opportunities youth want and need, where these spaces should be, and how the programs or spaces should be designed
 - Youth can also help with outreach because they are better-suited to reach out to their peers and ensure all voices are heard
- The community can come to the youth council for advice on issues involving youth
- A youth council at the school district level could help inform decisions about afterschool programs, such as what programs or clubs are offered, how much funding is needed, and where the programs should be located

Youth Safety



Youth safety, both physically and emotionally, should be at the forefront when deciding how third spaces should run. Having youth be directly involved in deciding how the program should operate and the group rules will contribute to a more welcoming and safer space for all youth. Addressing discrimination and having an accommodating and supportive staff are essential as well.

Racism, sexism, and all forms of discrimination need to be addressed by schools and programs.

- Programs need better protocols and procedures for discrimination, harassment, and bullying, as they prevent youth from attending
- Staff have to take youth concerns seriously and be there for young people when they need them

Afterschool staff need to get to know the youth attending the programs and be accommodating, supportive, and kind.

- Sharing casual moments, such as eating together, playing games together, and talking about shared interests, can strengthen the relationship between youth and adult program leaders
- Some youth do not feel safe or comfortable to be themselves around their parents, so third-space leaders should talk to youth before calling parents
- Third-space leaders should accommodate for youths' needs without parent permission, when possible
 - For example, allow youth to use their pronouns and names even if it is different from what others believe
- Having youth leaders is important as youth may feel safer talking to other youth

Often, environments can feel cliquy and exclusionary, so it is important to take steps to counteract this.

- Have games and activities that involve the whole group and/or have small group activities in which the groups change frequently
- Do not force youth to participate in activities as some youth may want or need time to relax and decompress

Program and group rules need to be co-created with youth to ensure a peaceful and comfortable environment.



Equity & Inclusion

Youth know that equity and inclusion is essential to the future of afterschool. All youth should be able to access quality programs and feel comfortable, welcomed, and heard. There must be a greater representation of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and disabled third-space leaders. Additionally, the program itself and the staff need to ensure an equitable and inclusive environment.

It is important for youth to have third-space leaders who share a similar identity to them.

- Vermont needs to incentivize more BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and disabled people to become third-space leaders, so young people with similar identities have adult role models they can relate to
- Third-space leaders running the program must listen and try to understand the young people they are working with

All youth need access to a variety of quality out-of-school activities and afterschool programs.

- Youth with special interests have less afterschool opportunities, especially high-school-age youth
- Funding primarily goes toward sports, but clubs and other activities deserve funding and attention as well
- Youth advisors should have a say in funding decisions for afterschool programs and clubs

All programs and activities need to be inclusive and welcoming. Ways to do this include:

- Giving youth the opportunity to help design and lead the program, club, or activity
- Ensuring there are enough resources for any and all youth to participate in the program or activity, regardless of skill level or experience
- Asking the youth that attend the program or club when it is best to meet, as later in the day is sometimes better than right after school
- Providing spaces for youth to go when they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious
 - Likewise, an open space for high-energy youth to move can be helpful
- Having food available at programs or activities, when possible, especially if that activity occurs in the evenings

Third-space leaders should have training in diversity, equity, inclusion, and youth mental health, so they can provide better support for young people.

- Third-space leaders should be paid to attend the trainings and/or the trainings should be free

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